

Initiative for Strengthening Provenance Research

For a pluralistic culture of remembrance, an open society, and against right-wing cultural policy

The independent **Initiative Provenienzforschung stärken! (Initiative for Strengthening Provenance Research)**, newly founded in 2024, advocates for an open society and against right-wing extremist tendencies. A critical and responsible examination of the past is fundamental to a vibrant, strong, and forward-looking democracy based on justice and diversity.

Provenance research clarifies the origin of cultural assets, in particular to address unlawful seizures that took place in the context of National Socialism, colonialism, the Soviet occupation zone, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In this way, it makes a decisive contribution to a pluralistic culture of remembrance.

Our initiative arose from an **association of doctoral students in the field of provenance research**. We are in contact with colleagues in the field, as well as with the German Lost Art Foundation (DZK), the Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung, and the Transdisciplinary Doctoral Network for Provenance Research (tpp), and also with civil society initiatives such as the Netzwerk Halt!ung.

We demand

- **Clear positions from all democratic parties** on protecting and strengthening provenance research
- Effective **protection against politically motivated attacks** and restrictions
- The **creation of more permanent positions**, also as a protection against the effects of short-term political changes
- Adequate and long-term **funding for research projects**

What we have already achieved

In **January 2025**, we published an **open letter** that has since been **signed by 260 experts**. In it, we address the central socio-political significance of provenance research and warn of the dangers posed by populist and right-wing extremist influences. We sent the open letter to **politicians at the federal and state levels** in the fields of culture, finance, and science.

Our concerns have not gone unnoticed: initial discussions have already taken place with some politicians. The number of experts signing the open letter continues to grow.

On the occasion of the **coalition negotiations between the CDU, CSU, and SPD in 2025**, we joined forces with the German Lost Art Foundation and the Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung to send a **letter to the Working Group on Culture and Media** on March 21, 2025. Provenance research has been included in the **coalition agreement for the 21st legislative period** with an entire section dedicated to it.

Collecting testimonials

For provenance researchers who work or have worked in regions where the AfD has achieved high election results, it is difficult or impossible to speak publicly about their experiences of intimidation or hostility from the right. We have also observed that some colleagues refrain (or are forced to refrain) from taking a clear political stance, contrary to their personal convictions.

We **collect testimonials from the everyday work of provenance researchers**. These anonymized reports are evaluated in order to systematically record the areas of work in which restrictions, threats, and attacks by right-wing actors occur. We document these cases confidentially in order to be able to assess the threat situation even more precisely. This enables us to make politically motivated incidents visible to the public and to urge politicians from democratic parties even more urgently to strengthen and protect provenance research.

Our goal: More protection, visibility, and political backing for provenance research!